

**TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY
YVONNE M. DUNKLE, DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING**

**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
SUB-COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES
FISCAL YEAR 2005 OPERATING BUDGET HEARING
JANUARY 28, 2004**

Introduction:

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and the members of the Committee. My name is Yvonne Dunkle and I am the Director of the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH). Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today on the activities of the Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and to address the recommendations contained in the analysis prepared by the Department of Legislative Services (DLS).

We would like to thank the DLS analyst, Deepa Bhattacharyya, for her careful review of the Governor's FY2005 Allowance for ODHH. While this was her first time working with our budget, she asked many insightful questions and I think she now has a good understanding of our agency and its mission. We obviously agree with her major recommendation to concur with the Governor's Allowance. We also acknowledge her comments that some of our MFR objectives and measures could be improved upon and appreciate her suggestions along those lines. As she pointed out in her analysis, we have developed a detailed and thorough draft plan outlining our strategic goals, objectives and strategies for the next five years. We expect this document, when finalized, to serve as the basis for our future MFR submissions.

We have been asked to comment on why ODHH has not been included in the Governor's proposal for the new Cabinet-level Department of Disabilities, as recommended by the Mandel Commission. Let me first respond by saying that it is my understanding that the Governor is still considering the Mandel Commission's recommendations. However, I do not believe that it was the Governor's intent for the new legislation to undo the fact that the deaf and hard of hearing community was able to demonstrate to the Legislature recently that their needs are distinct enough from the balance of the disability community to warrant a separate office. It is clear that there are a number of areas where the interests of ODHH and the new Department of Disabilities will overlap on common issues, such as accessibility on all levels, and it is the intention for both agencies to coordinate these matters as appropriate. For example, the decision has already been made to co-locate the two agencies if suitable space can be obtained. We support the Governor's proposal and look forward to working with the new Department whenever possible to improve the lives of Marylanders with disabilities.

I would like to tell you about some of the things that ODHH has accomplished in recent months, so that you will have a better appreciation of our mission.

Activities:

1. ODHH sponsored coalition meetings comprised of 45 different organizations serving deaf and hard of hearing people in the community across the State of Maryland by funding interpreter and communication access real-time translation (CART) services.
2. ODHH has taken the lead in coordinating meetings of various mental health professionals and community members to improve the services provided to individuals that are deaf and hard of hearing. Efforts will be made to work with the Mental Hygiene Administration along with other administrations under the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (ADAA, AIDS, and DDA).
3. ODHH has responded and monitored the impact of proposed cuts in mental health services for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. We also advocated filling the vacant Director position for deaf Mental Health Services within MHA.
4. ODHH worked to build a bridge between the Maryland State Steering Committee for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students and the Maryland Association of the Deaf to address their concerns about the status of the Maryland Quality Assurance Screening (MQAS) program for educational interpreters; advocated to fill the MQAS coordinator position within the State Department of Education (MSDE); and worked to make the MQAS a permanent program to improve the overall quality of educational interpreters in the public school systems with MSDE.
5. ODHH responded to the growing concerns of young deaf and hard of hearing people who drive without driver licenses. A meeting is planned that will include representatives of the Department of Transportation, ODHH and the Maryland School for the Deaf.
6. ODHH has conducted Public Forums across the State of Maryland to collect feedback on the development of a five-year strategic plan based on the results of five town hall meetings last year. In addition, the strategic plan was shared with administrators of MSDE, DORS and advisory councils with whom we will work in concert.
7. ODHH worked with Telecommunication Access of Maryland (TAM) under the Department of Budget and Management to provide sensitivity awareness training on deafness and telecommunication for all State building security personnel.

Thank you once again, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.